

Docket No. AUS920010059US1

**METHOD, SYSTEM, AND PRODUCT FOR EFFICIENT RETRIEVAL OF  
INFORMATION RELATED TO DATA INPUT INTO A DATA ENTRY FORM  
FROM THE DATA ENTRY FORM**

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**BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION**

**1. Technical Field:**

The present invention relates generally to the field  
of graphical user interfaces for computer based systems  
10 for data entry screens and other types of form  
completion. Still more particularly, the present  
invention relates to online form completion in which a  
plurality of fields are to be completed, where  
information related to data entered into the online form  
15 is retrieved from the form itself.

**2. Description of Related Art:**

Graphical user displays on electronic devices such  
as computers, web browsers, personal digital assistants,  
20 and wireless communications devices are common in the  
art. As these devices become more and more integral to  
activities in the daily lives of people such as web  
browsing, word processing, and even making telephone  
calls, the efficiency and ergonomics of these interfaces  
25 are extremely important. A user will quickly notice  
whether one user interface is easier and quicker to use  
than another based upon the number of operations required  
to perform a certain task. Further, the level of  
"intuitiveness" implemented in the user interface can  
30 greatly increase the usefulness and speed with which the  
user can operate the device.

Many graphical user interfaces follow the same

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conventions for navigation and selection of controls on the user interface. Such common graphical user interfaces ("GUI") include windows or frames-type displays in Microsoft's Windows operating system, UNIX operating system, IBM's OS/2 and AIX operating systems, Microsoft's Windows CE operating system, Apple Computer's operating system, and many "proprietary" windows-like GUI's on various devices such as PDA's, cell phones, electronic organizers, etc.

**Figure 1** illustrates a fundamental client-server arrangement of Internet and intranet communications. A client web browser computer **1** is provided with Internet access **2** to the World Wide Web **3** through common means such as a dial-up telephone line and modem, cable modem, or local area network ("LAN"). The web browser computer **1** is also provided with appropriate web browsing software, such as Netscape's Navigator or Microsoft's Explorer. A web server computer **5** is likewise provided with Internet access **4** to the World Wide Web **3** using similar means, or higher-bandwidth means such as T1 and T3 data lines, and a web server suite of software. Alternatively, client and servers may be interconnected via an Intranet **6**, such as a corporate LAN. These arrangements are well known within the art.

Hyper Text Markup Language ("HTML"), Adobe's Portable Document Format ("PDF"), and other web documents provide "hyperlinks" within the document, which allow a user to select another document or web site to view. Hyperlinks are specially marked text or areas in the document which when selected by the user commands the browser software to retrieve or fetch the indicated

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document. For example, the text:

<A HREF="http://www.patents.ibm.com">VIEW PATENTS</A

when embedded into an HTML document will produce a specially marked or highlighted string of text in the web

5 browser window which simply reads "VIEW PATENTS". Most commonly, this text will appear in underlined blue text, but the HTML document may specify alternate display characteristics for hyperlinks. If the web browser user selects the hyperlink, such as by clicking on the  
10 hyperlink using a mouse, the web browser will request the base document from web address www.patents.ibm.com using HTTP commands. The appropriate server for this web address will respond to the request by transmitting a web document, such as index.htm, to the requesting web  
15 browser.

Ordinarily, when the user selects a plain hyperlink, the current page being displayed in the web browser's graphical user interface ("GUI") window disappears and the newly received page is displayed. If the parent page  
20 is an index, for example the IBM web site www.patents.ibm.com, and the user wishes to visit each descending link (e.g. read the document with tips on how to use the site), then the parent or index page disappears and the new page is displayed (such as the  
25 help page). The user must click the browser's "back" button to return to displaying the parent page if desired.

**Figure 2** depicts a basic organization of many prior art computer systems, web browsers, and other  
30 computer-based devices. System **10** typically includes a microprocessor or central processor unit ("CPU")

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including computer memory, and may also include interfaces to hard disks and removable disk media **14**, and possibly interfaces to computer or communications networks **17** such as a network interface card ("NIC") or wireless communications interface. Commonly used NICs include Ethernet local area network ("LAN") cards, dial-up modem cards, and wireless communications circuits. Some of these circuits may be provided integral to system **10**, such as the case with web-enabled cell phones, or these circuits may be add-in operations such as PCI cards or PCMCIA cards for personal computers.

Additional typical hardware provided in system **10** includes a group of user input/output ("I/O") devices **13**, such as a display, keyboard, and/or pointing device, accompanied by common user I/O interface circuits to allow the CPU and system software to access and use user I/O devices **13**. Common display devices include VGA and LCD monitors for personal computers, and LCD panels for PDA and cell phones. Common pointing devices include "arrow keys", "tab" keys, mouse and scroll-mouse, joystick, track balls, glide point touch sensitive pads, and touch sensitive displays with stylus pens. Some devices, such as certain PDA's, do not include an actual keyboard, but rather rely upon a touch-sensitive LCD display with virtual pointing device and stylus.

The software functionality of computer-based systems **10** can be divided into low-level device drivers and BIOS **18**, an operating system **103**, and applications programs. Low-level device drivers provide hardware-specific interface functions which allow the operating system and application programs to access the system hardware

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through common or generic application program interfaces ("API"). Some device drivers include necessary communications protocols and methods associated with a particular hardware device, such as a modem or wireless communications interface. Application programs can be further divided into portable applications, or applet **101**, and non-portable, system-dependent applications **102**. Such division of hardware and software functionality is well-understood in the art, and can be applied to large computer systems such as an IBM AS/400 equally as well to small computer systems such as PDA's running Windows CE.

On the system display is typically shown a conventional frame or "window" of information related to a specific system function or program, such as a web browser. **Figure 3** illustrates a typical arrangement of a web browser frame **20** including a title bar **21**, tool bar **24**, display area **25**, and a pointer **201**. Pointer **201** moves in response to the system pointing device and/or keyboard, such as typing on the arrow keys, movement of a mouse, track ball, or joystick. Title bar **21** may include "buttons" for minimizing or restoring frame **23**, closing program **22**, as well as a display of the name of the function or program. Tool bar **24** typically includes a number of text and/or iconic options, such as "file" and "edit" drop-down lists.

**Figure 4** depicts an example, on-line form with a plurality of fields into which data may be entered in accordance with the prior art. This form is displayed in a web browser window **20** in display area **25** of window **20**. In this example, an order entry form is shown in which each ordered item has an item number **40**, a part number or

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catalog number **41**, a quantity of units ordered **42**, and an extended calculated price **43**. The form is provided with a submit order button **44**. In many common technologies on web servers and web sites today, this form would be an HTML form or a common gateway interface ("CGI") form. When the user has completed filling in numbers and information in the fields of the form, the user clicks on or selects the submit button **44** to cause data to be transferred from the user's web browser computer to the web site server.

For example, the user might enter a list of part numbers in order to obtain the current price for each item. In this example, the user must first enter in all part numbers for which a price is to be obtained. The form, including a listing of all of these part numbers, is then submitted to the web server. When the form is submitted, the form, including the list of part numbers, is transmitted to the server.

Once the server receives the form and list of part numbers, the server must retrieve each part number, search a database of part numbers, and locate the price for the part number. This process is repeated for each part number. Web server **5** then transmits these prices back to user's web browser which is executing on user's client computer system **1**.

This process is typically not very efficient, especially when a user repeatedly searches the database. For each search, the communications channel, either intranet **6** or Internet **4**, must transmit the search request from client **1** to Web server **5**, and then must transmit the results of the search back to client **1**.

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Further, web server **5** must execute a search of the database each time it receives a search request.

Therefore, a need exists for a method, system, and product for retrieving and displaying information related  
5 to data items entered into a form without searching a database.

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### **SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION**

A method, system, and product are described for efficiently retrieving information related to data items input into a data entry form displayed on a client computer system. The client computer system is coupled to a server computer system. The server computer system includes a database of a plurality of data items. Each data item has unique information associated with it. A data entry form is displayed on the client computer system. The data entry form includes multiple fields. Input data is received in one of the fields where the input data is one of the data items. The information which is related to this data item is retrieved from the data entry form without accessing the database on the server computer system. This information is then displayed utilizing the data entry form.

The above as well as additional objectives, features, and advantages of the present invention will become apparent in the following detailed written description.



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### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The novel features believed characteristic of the  
5 invention are set forth in the appended claims. The  
invention itself, however, as well as a preferred mode of  
use, further objectives and advantages thereof, will best  
be understood by reference to the following detailed  
description of an illustrative embodiment when read in  
10 conjunction with the accompanying drawings, wherein:

**Figure 1** depicts a typical client-server computer  
network in accordance with the prior art;

**Figure 2** illustrates a block diagram of a computer  
system in accordance with the prior art;

15 **Figure 3** depicts a graphical user interface frame  
presented by a web browser in accordance with the prior  
art;

**Figure 4** illustrates an example form with a  
plurality of fields into which data may be entered in  
20 accordance with the prior art;

**Figure 5** is a high level flow chart which illustrates  
establishing a database of a plurality of data items and  
unique information associated with each data item in  
accordance with the present invention;

25 **Figure 6** is a high level flow chart which depicts a  
routine executing in a client computer system which  
automatically retrieves and displays information  
associated with each data item entered into a form without  
searching the database described in **Figure 5** in accordance  
30 with the present invention; and

**Figure 7** is a high level flow chart which illustrates

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a server computer system retrieving data items and their associated information and inserting the data items and information into hidden fields within a form in accordance with the present invention.

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#### DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

A preferred embodiment of the present invention and  
5 its advantages are better understood by referring to the  
figures, like numerals being used for like and  
corresponding parts of the accompanying figures.

The invention is preferably realized using a  
well-known computing platform, such as an IBM RS/6000  
10 server running the IBM AIX operating system. However, it  
may be realized in other popular computer system  
platforms, such as an IBM personal computer running the  
Microsoft Windows operating system or a Sun Microsystems  
workstation running operating systems such as UNIX or  
15 LINUX, without departing from the spirit and scope of the  
invention.

The present invention is preferably realized as a  
JAVA script for use in a web object such as a hypertext  
markup language (HTML) page. The JAVA script is executed  
20 by the client or browser computer when received with the  
HTML page or other web object. JAVA scripts are capable  
of producing displays to users, of receiving input from  
users, and of combining those operations to produce a  
form-like user interface or data entry screen. Further,  
25 the JAVA script can perform operations on the data  
received or input, such as range and value checking,  
calculations, and format checking. JAVA is a well-known  
programming language, which is especially useful for web  
design and web programming. Other languages for  
30 programming such as C++, are also alternatives for  
implementation of the invention, depending on the

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environment of the graphic user interface to be supported.

The present invention is a method, system, and product for efficiently retrieving information related to data items input into an on-line data entry form on a client computer system. The client is coupled to a server computer system. A routine on the client, such as a web browser, first requests the data entry form from the server. The server then downloads the form to the client.

The data entry form includes a plurality of entry fields into which data items may be entered. Each data item is associated with unique information. When the client requests the form, the server will create two strings and store each into its own hidden field within the data entry form. The first string includes each of the plurality of data items separated by delimiters. In this manner, each data item occupies a particular position within the string. The second string includes the information associated with each data item. The information stored in the second string is stored in a position in the second string which corresponds to the location in the first string which its associated data item is stored.

The server then downloads the data entry form which includes a first hidden field wherein the data entry item string is stored, and a second hidden field wherein the information string is stored. These fields are not visible to users.

As a data item is input into one of the fields of the data entry form, the first string is accessed to

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determine the position of the data item. Using the position of the data item in the first string, an index is determined. This index is then used to locate the position in the second string which corresponds to the position in the first string of the data entry item. The information stored in this position in the second string will be the information which is associated with the data item input into the form.

As each data item is input into the form, the information which is associated with the data item may be acquired from the second hidden field. The process of retrieving associated information is executed only on the client computer system. Therefore, associated information may be retrieved without accessing the database on the server.

Any type of data item and associated information may be utilized. Product numbers and the price for the products represented by the product numbers is one example of data items and associated information. Therefore, when each product number is entered into the data entry form, the price for the product is retrieved from the data entry form itself and displayed to the user without the need for accessing the database on the server.

**Figure 5** is a high level flow chart which illustrates establishing a database of a plurality of data items and unique information associated with each data item in accordance with the present invention. The process starts as depicted by block **502** which illustrates establishing a database on a server computer system. Next, block **504** depicts storing a plurality of data items in the database.

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The data items may be any type of information which might be entered into a form. For example, one common type of data item is a product number. Thereafter, block **506** illustrates associating unique information with each data  
5 item. For example, a price might be the information associated with each data item. Block **508**, then, depicts the storage of the associated information in the database. Therefore, the database could contain a plurality of different product numbers and the price for the product  
10 represented by each product number. Thereafter, block **510** illustrates associating these data items and their associated information with a particular data input form. The process then terminates as illustrated by block **510**.

**Figure 6** is a high level flow chart which depicts a  
15 routine executing in a client computer system which automatically retrieves and displays information associated with each data item entered into a form without searching the database described in **Figure 5** in accordance with the present invention. The process starts as  
20 depicted by block **600** and thereafter passes to block **602** which illustrates a routine which is executing on a client computer system requesting a data input form from a server computer system. For example, a web browser which is executing on the client might request a data input form  
25 from a server computer system utilizing the Internet by accessing a particular web page on the server. The process then passes to block **604** which depicts the web browser receiving and displaying the data input form which includes hidden fields of data. Next, block **606**  
30 illustrates web browser receiving and displaying an input of one of the data items into one of the fields of the

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form. Thereafter, block **608** depicts a routine which is  
executing within the client, such as a Java script  
routine, locating the input data item within the first  
hidden field. Next, block **610** illustrates the Java script  
5 routine determining an index into the first hidden field  
using the data item's location within the first field.  
The process then passes to block **612** which depicts the  
Java script routine using the index to locate the  
information in the second hidden field which is associated  
10 with this data item. Next, block **614** illustrates the Java  
script routine retrieving and displaying the located  
information associated with this data item.

As an example, suppose product A sells for price a,  
product B sells for price b, product C sells for price c,  
15 and product D sells for price d. The first hidden field  
may then contain the following string of data:

"product\_A/product\_B/product\_C/product\_D". The second  
hidden field will then contain the following string of  
information: "price\_a/price\_b/price\_c/price\_d". When a  
20 product number is entered, such as product C, the Java  
script routine will locate product C in the first hidden  
field and determine an index using the position in the  
first hidden field where product C was found. Therefore,  
the index will indicate the third position in the first  
25 hidden field. The Java script will then use the index to  
locate the information which is stored in the second  
hidden field in the third position. Therefore, the Java  
script routine will locate "price c" which is stored in  
the third position in the second hidden field.

30 In this manner, as each data item is entered into the  
form, the information associated with the data item is

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immediately retrieved from the form itself and displayed to the user. The associated information is retrieved utilizing a routine which is executing on the client computer system. The server computer system and the  
5 database on the server are not accessed in order to retrieve the associated information.

The process then passes back to block **606**.

**Figure 7** is a high level flow chart which illustrates a server computer system retrieving data items and their  
10 associated information and inserting the data items and information into hidden fields within a form in accordance with the present invention. The process starts as depicted by block **700** and thereafter passes to block **702** which illustrates a server computer system receiving a  
15 request for a data input form. Next, block **704** depicts the server retrieving all data items from the server's database which are associated with this particular form. These data items are then stored, separated by delimiters, within a first hidden field in the data entry  
20 form. Block **706**, then, illustrates the server retrieving all associated information from the database and storing the information in a second hidden field in the data entry form. The information is stored in the second hidden field separated by delimiters in a position which  
25 corresponds to the position where the data item associated with the information is stored in the first hidden field.

Using the example described above, where product A sells for price a, product B sells for price b, product C  
30 sells for price c, and product D sells for price d, the server first stores the data in the first hidden field as



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a string of data:

product\_A/product\_B/product\_C/product\_D". The server then stores the information associated with these data items in the locations in the second hidden field which  
5 correspond to the location of the associated data item in the first hidden field. The second hidden field then includes a string of information:  
"price\_a/price\_b/price\_c/price\_d".

The process then passes to block **708** which depicts  
10 the server transmitting this data entry form, including the data items and associated information stored in two hidden fields, to the client computer system. The process then terminates as illustrated by block **710**.

It is important to note that while the present  
15 invention has been described in the context of a fully functioning data processing system, those of ordinary skill in the art will appreciate that the processes of the present invention are capable of being distributed in the form of a computer readable medium of instructions  
20 and a variety of forms and that the present invention applies equally regardless of the particular type of signal bearing media actually used to carry out the distribution. Examples of computer readable media include recordable-type media such a floppy disc, a hard  
25 disk drive, a RAM, and CD-ROMs and transmission-type media such as digital and analog communications links.

The description of the present invention has been presented for purposes of illustration and description, but is not intended to be exhaustive or limited to the  
30 invention in the form disclosed. Many modifications and variations will be apparent to those of ordinary skill in

the art. The embodiment was chosen and described in order to best explain the principles of the invention, the practical application, and to enable others of ordinary skill in the art to understand the invention for various embodiments with various modifications as are suited to the particular use contemplated.